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ABSTRACT

Five alternatives to standardized testing of student achievement are described in this brief overview. The first, criterion-referenced tests, are designed to evaluate the accomplishment of specifically stated instructional objectives. Student performance is judged on the basis of the objectives, rather than in comparison to other students taking the test. The second approach is teacher-made tests, which are usually criterion-referenced mastery tests measuring small units of instruction. They can be tailored according to specific curricula and students. Teacher training in test construction and use is recommended. Contract grading is the third alternative suggested. In this system, the teacher and the student agree on the course objectives for the student, the support to be provided by the teacher, and the evaluation method. The fourth topic is interviews. Information about student progress may come from interviews with students or their parents. The fifth method involves other documentation such as samples of the students' work, student journals and notebooks, and teachers' records. (GDC)

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ALTERNATIVES TO STANDARDIZED TESTS

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by

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There are several common criticisms of the use of standardized tests in schools. The tests don't necessarily test what students have learned. They do not necessarily test what the school has taught. They do not reveal what the student has achieved.

Critics have further suggested that alternatives to standardized tests be developed and used for more effective student evaluation. Such alternatives have included criterion- referenced tests, teacher-made tests, contract grading, interviews with students and their parents, and detailed documentation of a student's accomplishments. Each of these alternatives is described briefly below.

CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS

Criterion-referenced tests are designed to evaluate the accomplishment of specifically stated instructional objectives. They may resemble norm-referenced tests: in format and type of administration and scoring. A major difference is in their interpretation: on a criterion-referenced test, a student's performance is evaluated in terms of the objectives, rather than in terms of the performance of the other students taking the test. In this way, criterion-referenced tests can be more useful to teachers in identifying and planning remedial instruction in the areas in which an idividual student of the entire class has demonstrated weaknesses.

TEACHER-MADE TESTS

Teacher-made tests are advocated because they can be tailored to specific curricula or specific needs for information about students. Generally, teacher-made tests are criterion-referenced and are designed to measure students' mastery of the material being taught. They can provide information on small units of instruction not covered by standardized tests. For best results, teachers require opportunities for training in the development and use of tests.

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CONTRACT GRADING

In a contract grading system, the teacher and student agree at the beginning of a unit on particular course objectives to be fulfilled by the student, the support which is to be provided by the instructor, and how the results are to be evaluated. The contract provides a form of record keeping that documents student achievement in relation to specified objectives. Upon completion of a contract, teacher and student cooperatively evaluate the work, choose new assignments, and seek to clarify previous or newly stated objectives. One caution is in order: a contract should be used as a process for learning rather than merely an instrument for getting a job done.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews with students and parents can also yield information useful in evaluating the student's progress. An interview with a student can be as specific as a teacher sitting with a child and asking him or her to share information about how to solve particular mathematics problems. Or it may be broad, and probe classroom activities, student-peer interaction, classroom problems, and teacher and school goals. Parent interviews may yield unique ways of looking at their child's progress and promote a renewed interest in their child's learning.

OTHER DOCUMENTATION

Documentation of students and their work should include examples of the child's work (such as drawings or photos), the child's journal, the child's notebook or written work, the teacher's weekly records and assessment of the child's work, the teacher's reports to the parents, and sociograms. Extensive descriptions of the child's total involvement in the learning process should be included. Analysis of such documentation can provide meaningful evaluation of children's learning.

SUGGESTED READING

Muir, Sharon, & Wells, Candace. "Informal Evaluation." Social Studies, 1983, 74(3): 95-99. (ERIC No. EJ 284 691).

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